IOWAccess Project 14

Integrated Client Information for Mental Health Services

Mission

> To, through the use of web based technology, demonstrate the feasibility of linking state and county data information systems for persons with disabilities served through publicly funded services that permits the joint use of the information in individual case and system planning.

List of Members

Harold Templeman, Department of Human Services, Co-Lead
Deb Westvold, Iowa State Association of Counties, Co-Lead
Tammy Adkins, Department of Education
Larry Allen, Department of Human Services
Jerry Beatty, State Court Administrator's Office
Tom Bouska, Department of Human Services
Judy Dierenfeld, Community Mental Health Centers Association of Iowa
Joan Discher, Merit Behavioral Care of Iowa
Jerry Downin, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation
Victor Elias, Child and Family Policy Center
Lynn Ferrell, Polk County Health Services
Hollis Hensley, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Primary Health Care
Linda Hinton, Iowa Association of Rehabilitation and Residential Facilities
Mannie Holmes, consumer/psychologist
Steve Kerber, Appanoose County CPC
Margaret Knudsen, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Barbara Roland, MD, University of Iowa
Rik Shannon, Governor's DD Council
Max W. Smith, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
Katie Steele, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
Margaret Stout, Alliance for the Mentally Ill

Members Added During the Project

Beth Crowel, Monona/Harrison/Shelby Counties CPC
Suzanne Fross, Department of Human Services
Mae Hingtgen, Cherokee County CPC
Brad Leckrone, Franklin County CPC
Sandy Mireles, Hancock/Worth/Winnebago Counties CPC
Shane Walter, Sioux County CPC
Craig Wood, Linn County CPC

Staff

Arlinda McKeen, State Public Policy Group
Deb Kazmerzak, State Public Policy Group

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Section 1 ▪ Approach

Background
The Department of Human Services has several data systems tracking service and cost information on persons with disabilities. In addition, the counties have or are developing information systems, including County Management Information System (CoMIS), to track information on persons with disabilities seeking and receiving county funding. While information is available within the individual state and county service systems, currently no method is available to provide a complete picture of what the combined service systems are doing, and to identify issues that are not being addressed.

As the state and counties strive to improve management practices at different levels of government, it is becoming increasingly necessary that data be available to policy makers, funders, managers, planners, providers, and consumers.

Description
The expected outcomes from this pilot system were:
- Consumers of services will not have to provide duplicate information to various funders and providers of services.
- The system of services will be better coordinated and more seamless for consumers.
- County and state staff will be able to access information from each other's data systems.
- There will be reduced need for special demographic surveys.
- County and state staff will be able to obtain demographic information from the state and other counties to use in developing the annual county management plan.
- Information will be available to justify budget requests.
- Information can be shared among counties and between the counties and the state.

The primary levels of government involved in the project are the state and counties. The project team had representatives of state and county government but also involved other key players including providers of services which generate much of the information in the systems, the federal government which partially funds many of the services, and advocates for the disabled. The importance of involving the state and counties is obvious since they are the primary funders and managers of the system. The state and counties actually deliver few services. Most services are purchased from a variety of private providers across the state. As the deliverer of services, the providers create much of the information in the data bases. The federal government was initially involved since it both funds and provides services used by persons in the system.   Because of the limited funding and time available, it was not practical involve federal data systems in the project at this time. As pilot counties were identified, representatives from those counties were added to the team.

The state, county, and provider representatives were most active in the operation of the team. The full team, early in the development of the project, participated in identifying the expected results and the data bases to be involved. Once that was determined, the process became more technical, and the involvement moved to those persons with the state and the counties who currently manage the different data. As the project moved back into the evaluation phase, a broader part of the team was involved. Because of the confidential nature of the information involved, this project was not focused on providing the general public with information so no broader citizen input was sought.

Needs Assessment

Services for persons with disabilities are funded and provided by two levels of government, state and county. The state has collected significant amounts of information relating to the services it directly funds. Counties, with the development of the Central Point of Coordination structure, are starting to collect more information on the services they directly fund. Many persons with disabilities receive services from both the state and the counties. Currently, there is no data system that will track a person as they travel through the system using various services. This makes it impossible to know what it really costs to provide services to individuals, to do comprehensive planning, and to track client outcomes. Developing a methodology for the counties and the state to share information would be a move in the direction of resolving these issues.

Approach

Because the funding available for the project was limited, it was not expected that all the outcomes listed above could be achieved. The project team decided that the funds could be best used to actually demonstrate the development of a common warehouse that both the county and state systems could feed information into and then be retrieved on an individual case by case or an aggregate basis.

Since data systems belonging to two levels of government were involved, it was decided that a centralized warehouse should be used. Both levels could feed information in and the appropriate controls to guard confidential information could be developed centrally. Use of the internet made sense because most counties had access to the internet. The Department of Humans Services has a state-wide network but it is not possible to allow county access to the network at this time.

The work of creating the warehouse was accomplished through a contract with McGladrey and Pullen, LLP. A request for services was developed and sent to firms that have contracts with the state to do software development. Interested firms then submitted proposals with their estimated cost. A subcommittee of the project team evaluated the proposals based on pre-set criteria. McGladrey and Pullen was determined to have the best understanding of the project and their projected costs were within the project funds.

McGladrey and Pullen assigned staff to the project who worked closely with the project team and the pilot counties to develop and identify the type of information to be placed in the warehouse, the methodology for input of data into the warehouse, and the method for data retrieval. As each phase of the software was developed, the contractor's staff met with representatives of the project team to assure what was developed met the project needs and was in compliance with federal and state confidentiality laws. Once the software was developed, the contractor installed the software in the county information systems and on the state server used to actually house the warehouse.

As the project developed, it was determined that changes were required in the CoMIS data system used by most counties. The contractor worked closely with the staff in the Department of Human Services to develop and implement those changes. There were some initial minor problems with the operation, but these were quickly resolved. The complete project system is up and running in a limited number of counties.

The operation of the system is internet web based. Access is authorized centrally through the use of pass codes. A person authorized to use the system goes to the web page and enters their pass code. They are then able to access additional web pages that allows them to enter or retrieve data. Much of the information is confidential. To access information, other than information entered by that person, a release of confidential information is required. The release process still requires a paper trail and cannot be automated until an electronic signature is possible.

Section 2 ▪ Cost/Benefit Analysis

There were some initial delays in getting the project moving. Once it did move, an ambitious timeline was established that permitted the project to be completed in a timely manner. After the decision was made to use a contractor, a Request for Service was mailed to potential contractors on November 18, 1997. The request called for the contractor to start no later than December 1, 1997, begin system testing by March 1, 1998, and to have the system installed and accepted by July 1, 1998. The contractor spent most of January and February developing software. The end of February, the software was installed on the SQL server and tested. Training was conducted the first of April and in May and the pilot counties started entering data into the system. There were initial problems with county data but by June 5, 1998, all the problems had been worked out and the system from the county perspective was operational. Entering state data into the system was accomplished by July 30, 1998, which made the entire system operational.

At this time it is difficult to do a cost/benefit analysis. The project scope is very limited and at its current level, there are not cost savings that can be identified. The cost savings benefits of the system cannot be determined until additional information is brought in on a statewide basis. Areas of potential cost savings include quicker processing of service applications; better coordinated planning between the state and counties; and, through the use of demographic data, more efficient allocation of the state, federal, and county dollars in the system.

The project has demonstrated that the county and state systems can share information in an efficient manner and that there are potential benefits in future expansion.

The project was allocated $78,000. All of the funding was allocated to the contract for software development. It is expected that the total cost will not exceed the funds allocated. There were no hardware costs since the warehouse was located on an existing server within the Department of Human Services. The line costs for counties to access the warehouse are paid by the individual counties.

The cost to maintain the program at its current level is minimal. The Department of Human Services is maintaining the system as part of its administration of the CoMIS System. However, maintaining the system at its current level has little value. To achieve most of the expected results listed above will require expanding the system statewide.

Section 3 ▪ Evaluation

The project was evaluated during September and October 1998 using the following four points:

1. Data from diverse sources previously isolated will be synthesized and combined in a central data warehouse.

2. Consumer demographic and service information will be available and transferable between counties.

3. State program consumer demographic and service information will be available and transferable to the counties.

4. Aggregate county data will be available and transferable to state staff.

Evaluation of the four points was completed by staff within the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities who have been responsible for implementation of the of the project. The project was reviewed from both a technical perspective (whether the system technically does what it is intended to do) and from the perspective of the counties who have entered data into the system (whether counties were able to enter and retrieve data).

The following are the findings of the evaluation:

1. Data from diverse sources previously isolated will be synthesized and combined in a central data warehouse.

Strengths
Common data elements were identified from the county mental health information system and the state institutional data system allowing for the combination of the two systems into one easily accessible file. This union combines two of the primary sources of mental health data and enables planners to obtain a clearer picture of the service delivery system.

Medicaid eligibility information was also merged into the centralized warehouse and made accessible through the internet web page, allowing for access and viewing by local service planners. This access has made valuable Medicaid current eligibility data as well as historical eligibility data available to local service coordinators for the first time.

Weaknesses
None. The synthesis and the accessibility of the data in this pilot were extremely successful.

2. Consumer demographic and service information will be available and transferable between counties.

- Consumer demographic and service information will be available to other service counties to enhance planning and legal settlement decisions once releases are obtained and verified.
- There will be a reduction in the amount of duplicative information that consumers of services will have to provide to funders and providers of services.
- County staff will be able to obtain demographic and service Information from other counties to use in developing the annual county management plans and budgets.

Strengths
The pilot clearly demonstrated that county information could be transferred across the state via the internet.

The success of the warehouse made consumer demographic information from the participating county mental health systems readily accessible statewide by other county service personnel, allowing for the transfer of information.

Weaknesses
The methodology that was developed for maintaining confidentiality and verifying that releases of information had been obtained proved to be rather cumbersome and needs to be examined. A simplification of this process would make the system more readily acceptable and useable.

Because of the limited scope of the pilot and financial constraints, financial and budgeting components of the participating systems were not included. The addition of these components would make the project much more attractive, especially for the county users.

3. State program consumer demographic and service information will be available and transferable to the counties.

- County staff will be able to obtain Medicaid eligibility status and history on line.
- County staff will be able to monitor institutional utilization.
- Information on complete consumer service activity will be available to plan county development and formulate budget requests.

Strengths
State information from the Medicaid and institutional systems became available to other state agency and county mental health planners for the first time, showing great promise for future utilization and exchange from the state to local planners and funders.

County staff was able to monitor the status of institutional placements through the website enabling smarter funding decisions and more precise outplacement planning.

Weaknesses
The value of the information contained, again, was limited by the constraints on the project. The inclusion of service delivery and payment data will significantly enhance the value of the project to local participants.

4.   Aggregate county data will be available and transferable to State staff.

- Information will be available to justify legislative funding requests.
- Annual reports will be available from the warehouse without the counties having to prepare them.
- Centrally stored data will be available for aggregation to satisfy state and federal data needs reducing the need for special county surveys and information requests.

Strengths
The ability to combine the data from diverse sources was clearly demonstrated, thus enabling the capacity for the generation of aggregate system wide reporting.

Weaknesses
The actual reports and process for generating them were not developed during this pilot due to the funding restraints.

Ongoing evaluation and oversight will be provided by the State County Management Committee. This committee is established by statute and given the responsibility to provide joint state and county oversight to the operation of the disability services system.

Lessons Learned

The success of this project required the support and cooperation of both state and county government. Project 14 almost did not get off the ground. There was a determination at the state level that this project was going to be done without any involvement of the counties. The membership of the project team was initially unilaterally determined at the state level and two state staff were identified as the co-leads. County government in Iowa is particularly sensitive to State mandates or directives. To obtain full commitment and involvement, counties need to be included in the initial planning. County commitment and involvement was obtained but not without considerable discussion and debate.

There are still barriers to making the system as efficient as possible. One such barrier is Iowa's laws governing confidentiality of client information. The counties and the Department of Human Services serve many of the same persons in the system. Under Iowa's confidentiality

laws, the Department is considered one entity and share information internally but each of the ninety-nine counties is a separate entity. This adds complexity to assuring that proper releases are obtained.

Section IV ▪ *Future Plans – Conclusions & Recommendations*

Sustainability

The state and the counties agree there is little, if any, value in maintaining the project at its current level. While the project was able to demonstrate that the joint data warehouse was possible, it will have little value until the project can be expanded into a system that serves all 99 counties and incorporates additional information from the state's data systems.

The project should be sustained and developed into a state-wide system. The Department of Humans Services and the counties, through the Iowa State Association of Counties, will have the primary responsibility for continued development of the system. However, decisions involving project evolution and ongoing evaluation will be a joint process shared by all stakeholders.

Expansion

Expansion of the system is recommended. Expansion not only would permit reaching the full goals expressed in the project but would also assist in the acceptance and implementation of changes in state laws, such as legal settlement. Expansion of the system is possible using the software that was developed with the grant. The basic system as written can be used by any county that wants to enter data. A basic set of state data is available but needs to be expanded to include service cost information. As expansion occurs there will be some training costs but the bigger cost will be for system maintenance and potentially additional server space.

Phase in can be done over a two-year time period. By the end of Fiscal Year 1999, 50 counties could be using the system with all counties using the system by the end of Fiscal Year 2000. There would be no equipment or other costs to the state for expansion to other counties as counties provide the hardware required to be compatible within each county. To provide staff support to the counties under an expanded system, however, would require addition of one FTE at an annual cost of approximately $55,000. The Department has submitted an application for a competitive federal grant that could temporarily fund expansion and support of the system. These grant funds could be used for training and for additional staff to manage the system as it expands.

Expansion of the system to include additional data elements, e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation service data, would involve commitment and support from the state. To integrate each data element would require one-time programming costs of approximately $12,000. When an additional three or four elements are added to the system, there will be need to add a FTE to

support this expanded system, at an approximate annual cost of $55,000.

As the value of the information becomes more recognized as a decision making tool that contributes to the disability services system, there will be more opportunities for continued support from various sources. Some of the possible sources that will be sought will be legislative appropriation for mental health system funding, the managed mental health care contractor community reinvestment funds, and county funding.

As the project expands, it is envisioned to continue to be physically maintained from a server and website at the Department of Human Services.

This pilot project was important to illustrate what is possible with integrated data and the potential value to practitioners and policy makers of a statewide system to integrate mental health services data. Realistically, the system as it is now is of limited value to Iowa's CPCs or policy makers because it is not statewide nor does it include the complete set of data elements. In an expanded system, however, the data and information that could be shared and generated would increase timeliness of services to citizens and create key aggregate data for use by decision makers and policy makers.

Maintenance
The Department of Human Services currently has a staff person assigned the responsibility of maintaining the system that has been developed, and the Department's Division of Data Management is responsible for maintaining the server and web connection.

Intergovernmental and Citizen Focus
The Department of Human Services and the counties through the Iowa State Association of Counties have several ongoing relationships that can be used to maintain involvement and solicit system feedback. The data base system used by most counties, CoMIS, is a joint state/county system. A users group has been developed that can serve these functions. In addition, the Department and ISAC meet on a regularly scheduled basis to discuss problems, issues, and joint agendas. This group can be used to provide joint guidance for the expansion and operation of the system.

Marketing/Public Awareness
The primary public for this system are the persons at the state and county levels who are responsible for the overall planning and management of the system. Growing the system at this point primarily involves bringing more counties into the system. The CoMIS users group and other state/county relationships will be used to accomplish this.